



Winchester Councillors' Report July 2026

Local Government Reorganisation

The new unitary authority is likely to have the name 'Mid Hampshire', not very inspired. The new ward for the district will have the same boundaries as the existing County division. For our new proposed Itchen Valley ward there will be 3 councillors, with a total of 78 for the entire unitary authority. This works out at about one councillor for every 4,800 residents. According to Hampshire County Council the cost of setting up the new unitary will be between £130 and 163 million. Hampshire are taking legal advice about requesting a Judicial Review on the whole process. HCC are not happy about the composition of the proposed unitaries, their proposal was rejected by the Government. The New Forest District Council were also unhappy and they sort similar legal advice about a JR. Their lawyers quite sensibly advised them that the NFDC would be wasting their tax payers' money.

WCC is more concerned at the moment with working on an implementation plan that is safe and legal and that can function from May 2028. Vesting day will be April1st (Really!) 2028 when the new unitary takes over from the old authority. All this comes about through a Structural Change Order passed in Parliament. A draft is being worked on at the moment which will be given to Winchester for comment at the end of July.

Local Plan Impasse

A very complex situation has developed with the new local plan. Planning changes brought in by the Labour Government mean that the just completed local plan has to be revised immediately. Winchester is now racing to finalise the next Local Plan, but Winchester City Council will not exist after May 2027 and the plan will not have past all the stages to become legal. Only a legally constituted local council can produce a valid local plan. The Leader of Winchester City Council has written to Whitehall, pointing out these contradictions which appear to have been overlooked. The letter has been acknowledged and we await advice.

The Local Government Reorganisation throws all the pieces in the air. One factor is the boundary changes in the south of the district, (thankfully Alresford and the Itchen Valley have none!). Newlands parish is to be moved into South East Hampshire, basically Portsmouth. Although this parish is currently covered by the Local Plan, it won't be in the future, a dangerous state of affairs.

Winchester has succeeded in managing their Local Plans well, always having a legal plan in place and meeting the obligatory 5 year land supply and other requirements. Sadly not all the future partners in the proposed Mid Hants unitary authority have been as diligent. A lack of forethought by the Government might leave the old Winchester District with a local plan that although solid and robust, no longer legally valid as Winchester will have ceased to be a legal planning authority. Potentially a critical situation.

The situation has similarities with Odysseus struggling homeward with his crew, from Troy but being beset by hazards of storms and bewitched islands conjured up by capricious and unkind gods. What new difficulties will the gods of Whitehall dream up before the Local Plan reaches a safe haven?

River Matters

The program of upgrading Winchester Council owned Waste Water Treatment Plants (WWTPs), is going well. All those installed are now performing as expected to remove nitrates and phosphates, the results can be seen at Housing Performance - Winchester City Council

As many of you will know we were hoping that the Hobbs Close WWTP would be upgraded. Investigations have shown that this plant puts very little nutrients into the river, so that a replacement system would not generate sufficient nutrient credits to justify the cost. The WWTPS at Kiln Lane and The Brook in Old Alresford, and the Pastures in Cheriton are still in the plan.

There is also a pilot scheme in Bishops Sutton to have completely funded replacement systems. This has the potential to improve water quality in the Upper Itchen. We should point out that this is funded by Government money, not our local money! The Government's motive is to unlock housing numbers, the wisdom of this is debatable given water supply problems.

Public local concern, and our own, over the need to improve our chalk streams encourages us, take any measures we can to improve out chalk streams.

One of the common criticisms of the Nutrient Credit scheme is that it will just allow more housing that will in turn create more nutrients. There are tangible reasons why that is not the case, since the Local Plan for the Itchen Valley only allows new houses in zones where there is mains drainage and that there will be a phosphate stripper in place by 2030 if Southern Water meet expectations.

A less tangible reason, and one given by somebody that should know, is that we are assured that there is a margin on 30% benefit in nutrient reduction. If anybody can find evidence of this we would be grateful!

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